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VSNU
vereniging van universiteiten
association of universities
THE NETHERLANDS

... and strength in numbers

Quality first and foremost

Now, more than ever, universities are dealing with major paradoxes. For example, universities must go along with educational innovations such as the Massive Online Open Courses. But at the same time, more direct contact is needed between students and lecturers. Education and research also need to be more closely interlinked. But at the same time we want professionals in the lecture room *and* in the lab.

Luckily, most paradoxes only appear to be contradictions. A good example is this annual plan for 2014. On the one hand, the VSNU is focusing more on strategy, vision and the long-term. On the other hand, the plan we are presenting here is a one-year plan. Yet, these two things are compatible. Thanks to a clear strategy and vision, we can spend each year focusing on important ambitions in the long term. Enabling our strategy and vision will ensure that we won't need to rush from incident to incident and that we can respond pro-actively to the future.

The core of this working plan for 2014 is 'quality'. In all our efforts with the staff of the universities, with students, academics, with ministries and politicians and with industry and commerce, are prioritising quality. Quality in education and quality in research. The insistence on quality isn't something we've plucked out of the air. Quality is the core of our vision. Quality is what connects the Dutch universities.

It gives us great pleasure to present this work programme to you. We are confident about the year ahead, and hope that we, as the Association of research universities in the Netherlands, can build on the quality of society.

Josephine Scholten, Executive Director
Karl Dittrich, President

Annual agenda for the Association of Universities in the Netherlands

This agenda sets out the topics on which the Association will focus in 2014. The agenda was drawn up by the General Board of the universities. The annex contains a complete list of projects that the VSNU office is hoping to implement together with the university staff.

Proactive: future of universities

One of the major topics for 2014 is the future of universities. Questions that have risen are: 'What will the student of 2020 look like?' and 'Is the university's hundred-year-old business model still fit for purpose?' In 2012 the VSNU, along with the Rathenau Instituut, made a list of the driving forces and global developments influencing the Dutch knowledge economy and the Dutch universities. The Association also brought together critical thinkers both from within and outside the universities, to exchange ideas about the university of the future. In 2014 four regional conferences are being held. In addition, a second national conference is being held in the presence of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. Ultimately, by the end of 2014, this is intended to produce scenarios universities and their stakeholders can use to develop their vision, and underpin their strategic choices for the future. Other future-oriented projects on the agenda for 2014 include:

- Flexible (open online) education
- Collective Labour Agreement (CLA) of the future
- International positioning
- Reassessment of administrative relationships
- Stable public-private funding

Reactive: reacting to politics

The Association of research universities in the Netherlands is keeping a close eye on official developments. One of the major points on the political agenda in 2014 is the study conducted by the Working Group on Science Policy (IBO), which is an official working group commissioned by the government. The study aims to assess prospects for improving the Dutch science system. The VSNU provides the working group with much-needed information. The working group is expected to send its findings to the government in March, after which the government will respond to parliament. During this process, the Association will coordinate the responses and actions of universities and partner organisations. Other projects that the VSNU will be executing in 2014 in response to current political events are:

- Drawing up sector plans for the social sciences, educational sciences, and humanities
- Formulating the information agreement with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), which establishes the conditions for university's cooperation for government studies into education and research
- Response to parliamentary legislation on, among other things, university salary policy, animal experimentation and new legislation on temporary contracts

Always quality first...

In 2014 a number of projects are scheduled that focus directly on improving the quality of education and research and monitoring the improvement in quality. One of these is the implementation of the Action Plan for Teachersteachers' agenda. At the end of 2013 the universities presented their action plan, in which they presented their efforts in the area of attracting more and better qualified academic teaching staff to higher education, improving the quality of teacher training courses and teacher trainers and on promoting research into what does, and doesn't, work in the classroom. Other projects in the area of quality are:

- Improving academic excellence
- Implementing and monitoring the Coalition Agreement and performance agreements
- Developing new frameworks for quality assurance in research and education
- Developing a national system of valorisation indicators
- Further developing a sophisticated framework for accountability

... and strength in numbers

Representing the 14 Dutch research universities and informing the public about their work is an important task of the Association. We draw strength from the commanding position our universities hold:

- Dutch universities are among the best in the world
- Dutch universities deliver high quality education, academic research and valorised research output
- Dutch universities help to solve the major social problems of our day
- Dutch academics are excellent networkers. Be it locally or internationally, they work together with the best academics in their field and are able to connect with public and private stakeholders

The VSNU tweets on a daily basis, reports to the members weekly on the intrigues in parliament and distributes a newsletter monthly. In 2014 the VSNU will again organize VSNU Cafés where politicians, academics and other key figures will debate current political topics.

Other VSNU-wide communication activities in 2014 are:

- VSNU Spring Reception where we will host our business contacts (21 March)
- The Parliament and Science project: sessions in which academics catch up with politicians on current matters
- Science & Society evening: a dinner debate for social and political key figures in the Ridderzaal (Hall of Knights) in the Hague
- Coordinate communication surrounding the traditional start of the academic year at the beginning of September
- Coordination of the so-called U-meets and the Science Weekend, where the universities open their doors to the wider public

Projects and topics by domain

The agenda for 2014 has been established by VSNU's General Board. The General Board consists of Board members from the fourteen Dutch universities. The agenda was prepared by steering committees, consisting of a delegation of Chairs, rectors and Vice-Chairs from the research universities. The steering groups are supported by around 30 staff members from the VSNU office. For that purpose, the office is divided into domains. Each domain supports the appropriate steering committee. The domains, like the steering committees, work together on an interdisciplinary basis. This annex contains a list of projects that the VSNU office is hoping to implement together with the university staff in 2014.

A. Education

In university education, academic training for students is paramount. Connecting bachelor and master programmes with today's insights from research is essential. The universities guarantee the quality of the educational process, the standard of qualifications, the integrity of education and the relevance of education for the labour market. Higher education is susceptible to huge changes. New technologies are being used, the number of students is growing and the population is becoming more diverse. In addition, both universities and the Dutch government aim for ever-higher standards in quality. The drop-out rate needs to be lowered, the intensity of education needs to be increased and academic success rates must be improved. The universities, cognizant of their financial constraints, are offering more and better tailored programmes, reducing non-committal study habits. These efforts have led to an improvement, but more is needed in a number of fields.

1. Academic Achievement 2.0: The aim of this project is to support the universities in promoting academic achievement. The project is partly the result of the performance agreements that the universities have made with the Dutch government. In 2014 the VSNU will be organising at least five seminars or conferences where universities can learn from each other.

2. Action Plan for Teachers: The aim of this project is to implement the relevant parts of the Action Plan for Teachers presented by the universities at the end of 2013. Taking centre stage in 2014, among other things, is the intensification of information, the abolishment of the 'verwantschapstabellen' (course relationship tables) and the supervision of newly qualified teachers.

3. Flexible (open online) education: This project aims to provide universities novel instruments for thinking strategically about the opportunities and the impact of flexible online education in relation to various target groups, campus education and the profiling agenda. The VSNU is organising, among other things, a conference on this subject in the spring.

4. Abolishment of the "lottery" system: In the near future the lottery system for bachelor and master programmes with a fixed quota will be abolished. Instead, students will be hand-picked through an elaborate university admissions system. This represents a substantial change for a large number of programmes. The universities are preparing themselves, along with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) and the administrative organisation DUO, for the technical and policy-specific changes that are needed to successfully implement this system.

5. Sector plans: In 2014, a sector plan for the educational sciences and a sector plan for social sciences will be launched. Moreover, the VSNU will take charge on a future vision for the

humanities and arts. The future vision for the humanities and arts is due for completion by 1 July 2014. The other plans will be completed by the end of 2014.

6. Student Research Conference 2014: To stimulate an ambitious academic climate, the VSNU organises the Student Research Conference every year, which is a platform where peer reviewed student papers from different academic disciplines are presented. At the Conference, students from the Netherlands and Flanders are allowed to present their undergraduate research. In 2014 TU Delft is host and co-organiser of the conference.

B. Research and valorisation

The Dutch universities all strive to accommodate the best researchers and the best knowledge infrastructure, whilst solidifying solid cooperation with business and civil society. Knowledge accumulation and dissemination are important topics in this regard. As part of this ambition, the universities have made firm commitments to retain their high reputation which is continuously shown in the international university rankings. Discussions about academic fraud and the pressure to publish should be conducted in the open, nationally and within the institutions. Moreover, the quality assurance system must be elevated beyond any doubt. The VSNU's role is to facilitate national and European debate on research and valorisation and to agree on frameworks for quality improvement.

7. The Working Group on Science Policy (IBO): The Dutch government hopes to present a new vision for science policy in 2014. The Association of research universities in the Netherlands is an important stakeholder to this process. The government expects to make use of the findings of the Working Group on Science Policy (IBO) which will become public in March/April 2014. During this process, the Association will coordinate the responses and actions of universities and partner organisations.

8. Science in Transition: In 2013 a group of academics raised a number of questions about contemporary scientific practice. They argued that there was a misplaced emphasis on metric accomplishments in quality assessment and that society's trust in academia was under pressure. The VSNU will continue to play a critical and constructive role in this discussion.

9. SEP review: In 2015 the current standard evaluation protocol (SEP) is due to end. In 2014, together with the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), the VSNU will present a new protocol. This protocol will be used at universities and other research institutes.

10. Scientific integrity: As a follow-up to the KNAW advisory report 'Trust in Science', the Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice in 2014 will be reviewed on a number of points. Also, the first results of the agreements made in 2012 will become available and these will be analysed.

11. Promoting open access: The VSNU is discussing with the Dutch government and interest group representatives how the plans of the State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science can be implemented. These plans aim to make open access compulsory within ten years. This will make all academic publications publicly accessible.

12. Valorisation indicators: At the end of 2013 all the universities, working on the Valorisation Indicators Framework, have provided a set of indicators that will be tested until 2015. In 2014 the VSNU office will collect initial figures and organise workshops where universities can exchange experiences and best practices.

13. Modernisation of the PhD phase: The VSNU will draft a position paper on the desired development of the Dutch doctorate system.

C. Staff and organisation

High-quality education and research stands or falls with the quality of academics. Engaging and retaining talented academics and strengthening the appeal of the universities amid the academic community is therefore paramount. To that end, the VSNU deploys several projects in the area of HRM.

14. Collective Labour Agreement of Dutch Universities: the VSNU is the employers' organisation for the universities. The university sector has its own collective labour agreement. In 2014 three projects related to the collective labour agreement will take place:

- *Negotiations for new collective labour agreement:* the current collective labour agreement for the universities expired at the end of 2013. 2014 is the year where a new collective labour agreement will be negotiated. Until this comes into effect, the Collective Labour Agreement 2011-2013 will remain in force.
- *Implementation of Collective Labour Agreement 2011-2013:* There are still a number of agreements from the current collective labour agreement that require further attention and are due for implementation in 2014.
- *Collective labour agreement of the future:* together, the universities will consider the wishes for further modernisation of the collective labour agreement, to enable them to respond in the best way possible to global developments.

15. Co-funding of sector plans: The government has recently provided co-funding opportunities for several economic sectors which are aimed at keeping young people active in the labour market. The VSNU has commissioned SoFoKleS, the Social Fund for the Knowledge Sector, to analyse bottlenecks in the labour market, in order to assess whether the Association will submit a sector plan, and if so, on what topic.

16. Flexibility and Security Act (Flexwet): In July 2014 the law on temporary employment will be changed. Academic programmes with consecutive temporary contracts will then prove almost impossible. The VSNU aims to chart the consequences of the impending changes and inform the Ministries of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) and Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) of consequences for the universities.

17. PhD students: At present there are no legal or fiscal arrangements for PhD students. As a result, Dutch and foreign PhD students have a somewhat ambiguous status. In the 2011 Coalition Agreement the VSNU and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) have agreed that certain provisions for PhD students would be embodied in law. As part of a delineated experiment, the universities will increase the number of PhD studentships.

18. Job Classification System (UFO): What are the requirements for a job and which salary scale applies? All Dutch universities use the same job classification system (UFO). The VSNU administers the UFO and makes sure that it remains up-to-date and applicable.

19. Occupational health and safety catalogue: The Law on Working Conditions provides employers the opportunity to design tailor-made occupational health and safety measures in consultation with employees. The universities have jointly developed an Occupational Health and Safety Catalogue featuring the possible measures. The VSNU administers the catalogue.

D. International

The VSNU works to better position the Dutch research universities in the international playing field, whilst recognizing the contribution of an international strategy towards strengthening education and research in universities. The Netherlands and Europe are, to an increasing extent, dependent a knowledge-driven and innovation-oriented economy. Knowledge creation and knowledge circulation are essential to this. That is why, in order to maintain and strengthen its global competitive position, the Netherlands is dependent on universities that are well-placed both in Europe and internationally. To that end, they must - both collectively and individually - have optimal access to the national and international knowledge infrastructures and knowledge networks. To safeguard accessibility, it is hugely important to play a part in shaping the European agenda for knowledge and innovation policy.

20. International positioning: Together with Nuffic, the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in higher education, a study is being conducted on the international attraction of the Dutch universities. Where are the unexploited opportunities? How can we attract talented students? What role does transnational education (or 'offshoring') play in international competition?

21. Strengthening of mobility: 2014 will see the start of the new European programmes Erasmus Plus and Marie Skłodowska Curie. They offer, thanks to their larger scope, more opportunities for the mobility of students, lecturers and young researchers than ever before. How can universities take better advantage of this? The VSNU is compiling good practices and the necessary preconditions so that universities can learn from each other.

22. European research collaboration: European funding programmes for research are becoming increasingly important. The VSNU is developing, among other things, a knowledge map that will show the overall cost and benefit of the Seventh Framework Programme, the European programme for research funding in 2007-2013. In the forthcoming European programme the Netherlands will have to make the connection to smart specialisation strategies of the new regions.

23. EU elections and presidency: In May 2014 Europe will elect a new European Parliament. The VSNU, together with Neth-ER, the representative of the Dutch knowledge sector in Brussels, works to shape the conditions for the participation of Dutch institutions in the European programmes. The Netherlands is also preparing itself for Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2016.

24. Conclusion of Russia Year 2013: Russia Year 2013 yielded a great many new joint ventures. The VSNU is working on an evaluation and looking at how the new joint ventures can be structured.

E. Governance

The government sets frameworks and rules that create the conditions for higher education and research. Within this framework the universities have autonomy over specific choices in policy and spending. Autonomy at institutional level and at sector level as a whole is a condition for the successful operation of the research universities. Transparency in management structures, accountability in choices made, and efficient operational management are linked to this. As part of this agenda are subjects such as division of roles between the universities and the government, the governance of universities, the supervisory framework and the administrative burden associated with this.

25. Reassessment of administrative relationships: The legislation and regulations surrounding the governance of a university date largely from 1986, when the policy document on 'Higher Education: Autonomy and Quality' (HOAK) was published. In 2014 the VSNU and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) will analyse the developments in higher education legislation since 1986 and discuss the possible creation of a future framework.

26. Improvement in quality assurance system in education: The Ministry of OCW, and the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) and educational umbrella organisations are striving towards revision of the accreditation system by 2017. The universities would like to see a change: from the accreditation of degree programmes to institution accreditation. The VSNU also aims to reduce the administrative burden in this regard.

27. VSNU-wide contracts: When universities work together and make collective agreements with external suppliers, the costs of copy charges, for example, can be reduced. The VSNU will play a coordinating role in this.

F. Finances

The Netherlands aims to become one of the top five knowledge economies. The universities can and will contribute to this, to the best of their abilities. The VSNU aims to increase awareness of the investments needed in education and research and into the relationship between these investment and returns for the Dutch economy. Areas of particular concern are the increased expectations and tasks of universities on the one hand and shortfalls in funding on the other. The balance between direct government funding, indirect government funding, and contractual funding for research is also a consideration.

28. Stable public-private funding: Increasing student numbers and falling government funding necessitate tapping into private sources of funding. The VSNU follows the political decision-making process and responds to current developments in order to guarantee stability in the funding of universities.

29. Towards future-proof funding of higher education: The VSNU aims to develop a future-proof, integrated vision for the funding of higher education. This vision can form the basis for the introduction of capacity funding, differentiation of student fee(s) and suitable funding for part-time education.

30. Transparency in research expenditures: This project aims to answer the question: what do the universities spend their direct government funding on? This gives an insight into the relationship between input, throughput, output and outcome.

31. Matching pressure: With indirect government funding (Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)) and contractual research funding (Europe, the business sector and other providers) universities often receive subsidies for research at less than full cost. Accountants from Ernst and Young (EY) have been commissioned to investigate the amount of *matching*. *Matching* takes a bite out of the direct funding that the universities receive from the government.

32. Block-grant funding: The VSNU is monitoring critically how the block-grant for education and research will develop in the near future.

G. Accountability

The domain of Accountability collects all sorts of data about the performance of universities and makes this visible to society and the government. In doing so, universities show that they are reliable partners and that they can deliver the agreed results.

33. Monitoring the Coalition Agreement: In the Coalition Agreement the universities agreed on improvements in performance by 2015. In 2014 the first results of the performance indicators for education quality and academic achievement will be available. The universities will also assess whether they are on track.

34. Proactive accountability: Public organisations, including universities, frequently come under scrutiny in political and public debates. In 2014 the VSNU is entering into talks with political and key public figures. This will lead to a new, proactive approach in being accountable and communicating on different subjects.

35. Monitoring codes of conduct: The universities have agreed to to a code of conduct which is applied in university administration. In 2014 the VSNU will look at how the universities are implementing these.

36. Rankings: Ten Dutch universities are taking part in the initial phase of the new ranking system U Multirank. The VSNU will keep a close watch. Also in 2014 the existing international rankings will be further analysed.

37. Study information leaflet: The VSNU coordinates the creation of the so-called study information leaflets. By mid-2014, the leaflets must be part of the information material for all degree programmes. The leaflets allow prospective students to compare degree programmes more easily.

38. Top incomes: In 2014 the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations is likely to propose new regulations on top incomes. The implications for the universities are still not known. The VSNU is following developments closely.

39. Registration of PhD students: Estimates indicate that only half of all PhD students are included in the staff systems of the universities. Various universities are therefore setting up monitoring systems, to gain a better understanding of the intake and throughput of these 'hidden' PhD students. The VSNU is developing an overarching instrument.

40. Information sources: For many years, the VSNU has collected all kinds of data on universities, research, funding and doctoral conferrals. The data represents a welcome source for policy-making in ministries, inspectorates, branch organisations, media and politics. In 2014 the VSNU will continue to compile facts and figures.